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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000731

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SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER ON PLANS FOR REGISTRATION OF
IVOIRIAN NATIONALS AND FOREIGNERS

REF: ABIDJAN 568 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM V. VALLE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Prime Minister Banny, accompanied by his Justice Minister, convoked ECOWAS ambassadors and several members of the International Working Group (IWG) to Yamoussoukro on July 9 for a hastily-scheduled meeting on his government's plans to launch a program, scheduled to begin on July 15, to document approximately four million unregistered people born in Cote d'Ivoire. The program, known as audiences foraines (itinerant hearings or AF) will draw on lessons learned from the pilot identification program carried out in May of this year (reftels) and is scheduled to take two months. Although the project is sure to encounter many problems and take longer than scheduled, Banny rightfully stressed the importance of actually starting to implement it.
End summary.

¶2. (U) The AF program is designed to document all unregistered people born in Cote d'Ivoire who are over 13 years of age. Up to three months after birth, parents or guardians may apply for birth certificates for their children. After three months, a court decision establishing the legal status of a person is required in lieu of a birth certificate. It is to those currently undocumented people who never benefited from a court decision that AF is addressed. Those under 13 years of age are being handled in a separate program that the government is carrying out in cooperation with UNICEF.

¶3. (U) Unregistered people born in Cote d'Ivoire include both Ivoirian citizens and foreigners. In order to have claim to Ivoirian nationality, individuals must have at least one Ivoirian parent, or have been naturalized, adopted, or acquired nationality through marriage. The program will not cover individuals born outside of Cote d'Ivoire, be they Ivoirians or foreigners.

¶4. (SBU) The government plans to send teams comprised of 7-10 people to conduct the AF in both rebel- and government-controlled areas and in the Zone of Confidence. Each team will consist of two magistrates, a prosecutor, a translator, a medical doctor (to certify the age of applicants), and several others. The program will be carried out in three phases. Initially, there will be 50 teams, with the number of teams increased gradually to 150. As with the pilot program, individuals will have to apply at the localities where they were born.

¶5. (SBU) According to the Justice Minister, applicants who are found to be Ivoirian citizens will receive certificates of nationality at the end of the process. This will allow them to receive an Ivoirian identity card, which in turn will allow them to register as voters on the electoral lists. (The Minister did not provide details as to how this follow-on process would work.) Foreigners will receive

temporary or permanent resident cards. At the time they appear for their interviews, individuals will be separated into self-selected groups of Ivoirians and foreigners, the final status of which will be determined by the AF teams.

¶6. (C) The Prime Minister noted that the AF process will be free of charge to applicants. The only costs that they will incur will be to transport themselves to their localities of birth. The PM stressed the importance of conducting an effective identification process so that the elections are incontestable. Banny added that he had two fears: first, that people will be afraid to show up for the application process, and second, that supporters of the various Ivoirian factions will think that only opponents of their particular parties will receive identification documents.

¶7. (C) In the discussion period, questions were raised about the adequacy of the two-month period allocated for the identification process and about possible intimidation of applicants, particularly non-Ivoirians, in light of the planned segregation between citizens and foreigners. Banny responded that the government was not planning on discriminating against foreigners and that it was essential that proper security be provided. For this, he solicited the assistance of the UN. According to Banny, the Ivoirian Forces of Defense and Security (FDS) and the UN will provide security in government-controlled areas, the Forces Nouvelles (FN) and UN will do so in the rebel-controlled north, and joint patrols consisting of FDS, FN, and the UN will provide security in the Zone of Confidence.

¶8. (C) On the length of time required to complete the operation, Banny acknowledged that the issue would not be resolved and completed within two months. However, it was

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important to launch the program, which in turn would allow a start to the process of issuing identification cards and preparing electoral lists. As a result, the PM added that the number of people involved is "entirely relative." The Minister of Justice also commented that the two-month deadline was needed to speed things up and that after this initial period he would present the results to the Prime Minister.

¶9. (U) In response to another question, Banny said that the government is studying how IDPs and refugees will be affected by the AF process, particularly since individuals are supposed to apply where they were born. Right now, the government does not even know how many displaced people would be unable to apply in their home localities.

¶10. (C) Comment: The implementation of the AF program is sure to encounter many problems. Almost certainly, it will take much longer than scheduled. Nevertheless, we agree with Banny that the most important thing is to start the process and move from talk to action. We also find his reaching out to ECOWAS Ambassadors, whose nationals are heavily represented in Cote d'Ivoire, to be a positive step.

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